TEXAS MESSENGER

NOVEMBER 2026

The Texas District • The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



By the numbers



Rev. Dr. Jon Braunersreuther
District President

Do numbers matter in and to our congregations?

Well, of course they do! Scripture is replete with counting, including the number of new believers: Peter "bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:40-41).

While numbers are far from the only thing that matter in and to our congregations, they matter insofar as they represent people who are important to God, who wants "all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4 NIV). Our church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has made a census of its congregations since nearly its inception.

Here are some numbers that matter to our congregations and to each of us as individual Christians.

In round numbers, about 30 million people live within the geographical boundaries of the Texas District. So far as we can ascertain from the research data, perhaps one in four of those people trust in Jesus as their savior. Thanks be to God for the 7 to 8 million people in Texas whom God has drawn to himself by the power of the Holy Spirit! But that leaves upwards of 22 million folks who are far from God and have an eternal destiny apart from Him. That's a lot! We have work to do! (A note about the numbers: counting the number of people with faith in Jesus is an inexact task. But even if the number is two in four who trust in Jesus, that's still 15 million who do not.)

The bottom line: we do not have to go to a foreign country to find the mission field (as important as that work is). All we have to do is walk outside the door of our churches, homes, offices, schools and places of work, and there it is. Pick out four people at the mall. Using the numbers above, statistically speaking, three of them are far from God. Jesus said, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest" (John 8:35 NIV).

Our common cause is to reach them. With the best message in the world! That Jesus Christ paid the price through His sacrificial death on the cross, so that those who are far from God might trust in Him and spend eternity with Him forever! That's the core of our common convictions. It's a cause that is best achieved, with convictions best maintained, when we work together in common community. (See 1 Timothy 4:16, 2 Corinthians 5:14ff., Acts 15:1-31, and 1 Corinthians 12:4-31.

Do the numbers matter? Yes! We count people because people count.



TEXAS TWO-STEP

Program

WHAT IS IT?

Texas Partners in Mission and Texas Church Extension Fund are pairing up to increase the financial resources available for planting new congregations. Both contributed dollars and invested dollars are needed to meet the challenge of planting new ministries. The Texas Two-Step Program seeks to multiply your gifts and your investments to accomplish the important work of bringing the Gospel to more and more people.





HOW IT WORKS:

- An investor opens a new fixed-rate investment of $5,000 or more and gives a gift of at least 10% of the initial investment amount to Texas Partners in Mission.
- Texas District Church Extension Fund will match the gift 100 % to Texas Partners in Mission AND pay an additional 1% APY during the first term of the new investment.

TO LEARN MORE:

Visit texascef.org/investments/texas-two-step

INCREASE YOUR INVESTMENT DOUBLE YOUR DONATION

EVERY DOLLAR CONTRIBUTED TO TEXAS PARTNERS IN MISSION GOES DIRECTLY TO BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW JESUS CHRIST. THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO THE MISSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. GIVE NOW AT TXLCMS.ORG/TPIM. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Because we trusted God



Rev. Peter Mueller
Mission Strategist, Area C

I would be honored to introduce you to one of the many faithful vicars who serve alongside us in our Texas District.

Please meet Vicar Chris Rusare Rugazura. He and his wife, Beatrice, have been married since 2007 and are blessed with a beautiful daughter named Hadassah Faith.

Chris is leading New Creation Mission Church, San Antonio, thanks to the active engagement of LINC South Texas and a group of local LCMS congregations. He is also working toward completing the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) program of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Chris's path to pastoral ministry is quite different from many of our own. In fact, his younger years tell a story fit for the movies. He was born in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in a village without roads or electricity. The way of life centered on raising cattle, sheep, goats and chickens. Despite the agricultural focus, the main activity of the village was worship.

When Chris was around 12 years old, a rally was held in his area, led by a preacher named Billy Graham. Thousands of people attended. As Chris remembers it, Rev. Graham spoke of a vision for his life, that he would become a bridge for many people and that his residence would one day be in the United States.

Unfortunately, the DRC has endured decades of war and conflict. In 2009, Chris's village was attacked. People were killed with machetes, others were shot, and some were captured and burned in their homes. People tried to save their lives however they were able. Many ended up in Burundi, Rwanda and Kenya.

Despite the intense difficulty, Chris acknowledges that this was also the time when his calling began to take shape. By then, he had become known as an evangelist, with a passion for preaching on the streets and in the markets. He even had a vision of opening a church.

With the support of his family, a new church was planted. They started outside, with no shelter from the rain or sun. They had no chairs or equipment.

"But because we trusted God," Chris recalls, "one man came and found us praying outside and told us

See VICAR, Page 14



Vicar Chris Rusare Rugazura is pictured at left with elders at New Creation Mission Church, San Antonio.

The stories we may never know



Dayna Dinan
Marketing/Communications Coordinator

There's something about November that makes us pause and take stock. Maybe it's gathering around a table with people we love. Maybe it's looking back over a year that didn't go exactly as planned but still held more blessings than we realized. Or maybe it's simply the word Thanksgiving showing up everywhere we look.

Whatever the reason, this time of year reminds us to notice. To notice what God has provided. The people He has placed in our lives. The opportunities we've been given. The churches, schools and ministries that have shaped us and our families.

And when we really begin to notice all we've been given, gratitude has a way of changing the way we see what we have. Along with asking, "What am I thankful for?", we might begin asking "What could God do with what He has placed in my hands?" That's where gratitude begins to look a lot like generosity.

What if something you do today could strengthen a ministry 20, 30 or even 50 years from now? What if a congregation could prepare not only for the needs it sees today, but for ministry opportunities that haven't even presented themselves yet? What if more families could choose Christian education for their children? What if a gift made today could open a classroom door for a student tomorrow?

There is something exciting about generosity when we stop thinking only about the gift itself and start thinking about what the gift could make possible. At Legacy Deo, we get to have those conversations every day.

Our Mission Legacy Initiative was created to help churches, schools and Christian ministries think intentionally about their future. So much of ministry understandably focuses on what is right in front of us. There are programs to fund, buildings to maintain, people to serve and needs that require attention today. But what about tomorrow?

Through the Mission Legacy Initiative, ministries are encouraged to begin conversations about legacy giving and long-term generosity. It is an opportunity to consider how the resources God has provided today might continue supporting ministry for generations to come.



Rev. John Karle, director for campus mission at University Lutheran Chapel in College Station, talks to young adults at a servant event held during the 2026 Winter Retreat at Camp Lone Star last February. University Lutheran Chapel has an endowment with Legacy Deo.

And we already see what that kind of generosity can do. Endowments are providing resources for outreach, strengthening Christian education and helping ministries respond to new opportunities. Our clients are experiencing firsthand what happens when the generosity of yesterday becomes the ministry of today. University Lutheran Chapel (The Chapel) at Texas A&M University is one example.

For many years, The Chapel has had a presence in College Station, reaching generations of students with the Gospel. Today, that mission continues in a rapidly changing campus environment, serving both American and international students through worship, Bible study, fellowship, service and conversation. Behind that ministry is something remarkably simple: people who chose to give.

"We love our endowment with Legacy Deo and the generosity of donors who have made it possible," said Rev. John Karle, who serves as campus pastor. "What the endowment income does for us is provide the stability that a point of the spear campus

See LEGACY, Page 14

HOUSTON



Emily Grace Exner was baptized on June 7 at Memorial Lutheran Church. She is pictured with her parents, Kyle and Kelley Exner; her sister, Sadie; and Rev. Preus Hasselbrook, Memorial associate pastor.

BOWIE



Rev. Dr. Robert Holaday was installed as pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church on Sept. 12. Pictured are, from left, Revs. Dr. Douglas Kabell, Dr. Robert Holaday, Dale Snyder, Steven Brummett and Eric Stinnette.

Happenings around Texas

Submit your news!

Send photos, stories and newsletters for The Lutheran Witness to:

txmess@txlcms.org

Texas Messenger
1221 Satellite View
Round Rock, TX 78665

Please be sure all photos sent electronically are in color and 300 dpi (high resolution).

The Texas Messenger is available online at **txlcms.org**.

HUFFMAN



Rev. John Moore is pictured with the 2026 confirmands of Our Shepherd Lutheran Church, from left, Jenna Landel, Kaitlyn Larson, Benjamin Thompson, Baleigh Larson, Abigail Kurth and Brayden Smith. The youth professed their Christian faith on May 24.

SAN ANTONIO



Members of King of Kings Lutheran Church stuffed 200 tote bags with school supplies. The bags were delivered to the Orphan Grain Train branch in HIghland Lakes. The delivery also included 12 grocery carts full of clothing, toys, blankets, socks, underwear and sundresses, and nine quilts that were made by King of Kings members.

Orphan Grain Train will distribute the donations to those in need.



GUN BARREL CITY



At St. Peter Lutheran Church, Paisley Farmer presented Rev. D.R. Nelson with stepping stones she painted, which includes a favorite statement of Pastor Nelson. They are being displayed in the rock garden created by the St. Peter preschool children, which is located by the entrance to the preschool.

ALEMAN



St. Paul's Lutheran Church celebrated its 140th anniversary on Sept. 27. Pictured are, from left, Rev. Don Poole, St. Paul's pastor, and Rev. Dagan Siepert, a son of the congregation who returned to preach for Divine Service. Rev. Siepart serves as pastor of Our Redeemer, New Ipswich, N.H.



Beth Salo was received into membership at St. Paul's on Sept. 13 through Baptism and the Rite of Confirmation. She is pictured with Pastor Poole.

WINNIE



▲ The LWML of Hope Lutheran Church meets weekly to create quilts. Fourteen of these quilts were donated to Orphan Grain Train.



▶ The Hope congregation expressed its appreciation for Rev. Timothy Dinger; his wife, Nancy, and daughter, Leah, for their faithful service. Pastor Dinger had retired from the pastoral ministry, only to return and serve Hope's vacancy for over two years.

HILLSBORO

Sofia Grace Nemec was added to the Christ Lutheran Church (CLC) family through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism on Sept. 13. Sofia was blessed to be baptized by her grandfather, Rev. Michael Nemec, who serves as CLC pastor.

We give thanks and praise that God graciously preserves and enlarges His family at Christ.

Pictured are, from left, sponsors Cole and Abby Hollingsworth, with Sofia; Pastor Nemec, with big brother Oliver; and parents Diego and Daphne Nemec, with big sister Catalina.



HOUSTON

Rev. Kingston Sujit (fourth from left) was ordained and installed as associate pastor of St. Mark Lutheran Church on Aug. 22. He will start a Tamil-speaking ministry at St. Mark alongside Rev. Matt Popovits, senior pastor.

Pastor Sujit is a graduate of the Cross-cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University Irvine (in partnership with Concordia Seminary, St. Louis). We're so thankful for Pastor Sujit and excited to see where God leads him in this new ministry!



WHITNEY





AT LEFT: Rev. Philip Wottrich and the congregation of Our Savior Lutheran Church welcomed four new members during the 50th anniversary celebration on Sept. 13. **ABOVE**: Rev. Jerome Teichmiller, emeritus, preached for Divine Service. Rev. Teichmiller chartered Our Savior in the early years of his ministry. At the time he was serving as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Clifton.

ABILENE



Spade Martin Tibbetts was baptized at Our Savior Lutheran Church on Aug. 30. Also pictured are her parents, Morgan and Brandy Tibbetts; her brothers, Ackley and Brux; and Rev. Robert Pase, Our Savior pastor.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

Mount Calvary, San Antonio
Bill and Louree Greehey
63 years, Aug. 8

Don and Loveta Cummings
69 years, Aug. 23

Jeff and Ann Harwood
53 years, Sept. 14

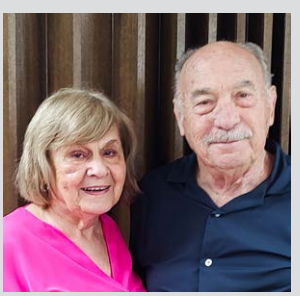
Lamar and Inkie Gillian
59 years, Sept. 16

Jim and Bonnie Koenig
61 years, Oct. 9

Our Redeemer, Wichita Falls
Chris and Rebecca Harmel
50 years, Oct. 9

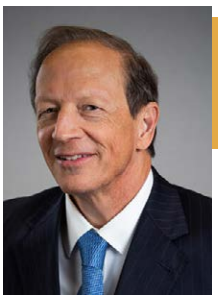
Gethsemane, Houston
James and Darlene Ellison
60 years, Nov. 25

Our Savior, Abilene
Walter and Pat Kionka
60 years, Nov. 24



Good Shepherd, Cleveland
Jimmie and Sigrid Pair
62 years, Oct. 2

Mission focused



Dr. Bill Hinz
Director, School Ministry

Our Texas District Lutheran schools have opportunities to minister to children and their families — to bring people to Jesus and Jesus to people. Families and children experience the love and care of Jesus Christ as they enter the "school door" of the congregation. Many families who would otherwise not be touched by our congregations are touched by the Gospel through our Lutheran schools.

The office of School Ministry here in the Texas District is part of a district-wide focus on sharing Christ with more and more people. Our schools are blessed to share Christ daily with over 15,000 students. We have the privilege of sharing the love of Christ and His eternal promises, and are blessed to witness the Baptisms of children and confirmations of adults who are connected through our schools.

We are blessed to be in a state that continues to have rapid growth. Our schools are reaching out to more and more students — who are not yet members of our congregations — in their communities. This provides us with a tremendous opportunity to share Jesus with more students and families, and to extend our reach into the community. It is an exciting challenge to offer students and their families the opportunity to hear about Jesus in our schools.

Our Lutheran schools strive to achieve excellence in academics and provide an environment that nurtures spiritual growth not only for the students, but also for their families. Schools that share Christ, and help students develop as missional people, is a significant calling in the culture in which our students and families live today. Our students are growing up in a culture that does not know Jesus Christ. What a blessing that our students daily learn about Jesus and the Word of God in our Lutheran schools and churches.

Proverbs 22:6 shares that if we "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Please pray for the children in your life. What a great blessing to be able to share Jesus and His love and forgiveness with children of all ages.



Students, family and friends gather to celebrate a Baptism.

God is …



By Pat Fick
CAN-DO Director

At the beginning of the school year, I asked our campus ministry student leaders to complete the phrase, "God is …" with something they learned about God this past summer.

Following are the results.

- God is the potter.
- God is everything I'm not.
- God is constant.
- God is a promise keeper.
- God is faithful and fun.
- God is gracious.
- God is close.
- God is patient.
- God is open.
- God is for me.

How would you finish the phrase? I said, "God is in the details!" Time and again, God surprises me by answering prayers, providing help, and causing things to work together for good! I shouldn't be surprised. After all, Paul writes in Ephesians 3:20-21:

> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Far more abundantly! Nothing is too difficult! His arm is not too short to save!

God is at work in and through you, and He wants you "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19).

Feel free to pray through our student leaders' list, thanking God for who He is and all He has done for us. Remember, the greatest act of love in all of history was Jesus dying for us on the cross so that He would never have to live without us. God is in the details, and He is mighty to save!



VICAR (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)

to come. He gave us a place in a primary school."

After seven years in Kenya, Chris was legally brought to this country in 2016. When he arrived, the call continued. Other immigrants from east and central Africa gathered around him. They told him, "When we go to worship services here, we do not understand the English language, and our children's prayers are decreasing."

New Creation Mission Church was born. Today, their ministry focuses on proclaiming the Gospel, serving human need and equipping believers.

Chris and the ministries he is leading — both in San Antonio and back home in Africa — have significant needs. Sometimes there does not seem to be a clear path forward. But this man of deep faith continues to lean on our faithful God, counting on His divine plan and provision.

If you would like to learn more about Chris or explore ways to engage with this mission effort, I encourage you to reach out to Rev. Carlos Boerger at *carlosboerger@gmail.com*. Carlos serves as a tireless mentor, encourager and friend to Chris. Together, they are making an eternal difference in the lives of many.

LEGACY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

mission needs to meet the rapidly changing opportunity before us."

That stability creates possibility. It gives ministry leaders room to look ahead, respond to changing needs and put the right people in place to carry out the mission. A gift given years ago becomes part of a conversation with a college student today. Generosity from one generation helps make ministry possible for the next. And the story isn't finished.

Students being reached today will become teachers, parents, pastors, business leaders, neighbors and members of congregations across the country. We cannot know all the places God will take them or all the people their lives will touch. That is the beautiful possibility of generosity. We rarely get to see the end of the story.

That same sense of possibility is at the heart of Legacy Deo's Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO). Through the federal Education Freedom Tax Credit, individuals have a new opportunity to help provide scholarships for students, including those seeking a Christian education.

For some families, Christian education may feel financially out of reach. A scholarship has the potential to change that. It can open the door to a classroom where faith is part of everyday life. It can give a Christian school the opportunity to welcome a student who might never otherwise have walked through its doors. And it can give a child the opportunity to learn and grow in an environment where teachers are free to point them toward Christ.

The possibility doesn't stop at the classroom door. Who will that student become? Where will God lead them? Whose life will they influence? Perhaps someday that child will become a teacher who pours into another generation of students. Maybe a pastor, missionary, business leader, parent or faithful member of a local congregation. Perhaps the greatest impact will happen quietly, through a life shaped by faith and lived in service to others. We simply don't know.

Just like the donors whose generosity helped make ministry at The Chapel possible years later, those who help provide scholarships today may never see the full impact of their generosity. They are simply helping begin the story. Gratitude has a wonderful way of helping us recognize what already is. Generosity invites us to imagine what could be.

This Thanksgiving, as we count the blessings God has placed in our lives, perhaps we can also take a moment to look at them differently. Not simply, "Look at what God has given me." But also, "God, what could You do with what You've given me?"

Maybe it could help a child receive a Christian education. Maybe it could strengthen a church or ministry. Maybe it could establish an endowment that continues supporting Gospel work long after we are gone. Maybe it could become something we haven't even imagined yet.

We don't know exactly what the future will hold. And we may never get to see the end of every story our generosity helps begin. But we can be faithful with what God has placed in our hands today and trust Him with what comes next.

Because sometimes the greatest possibilities begin with a simple act of generosity.

A milestone at St. Peter



Becca Jones
Texas CEF Executive Director

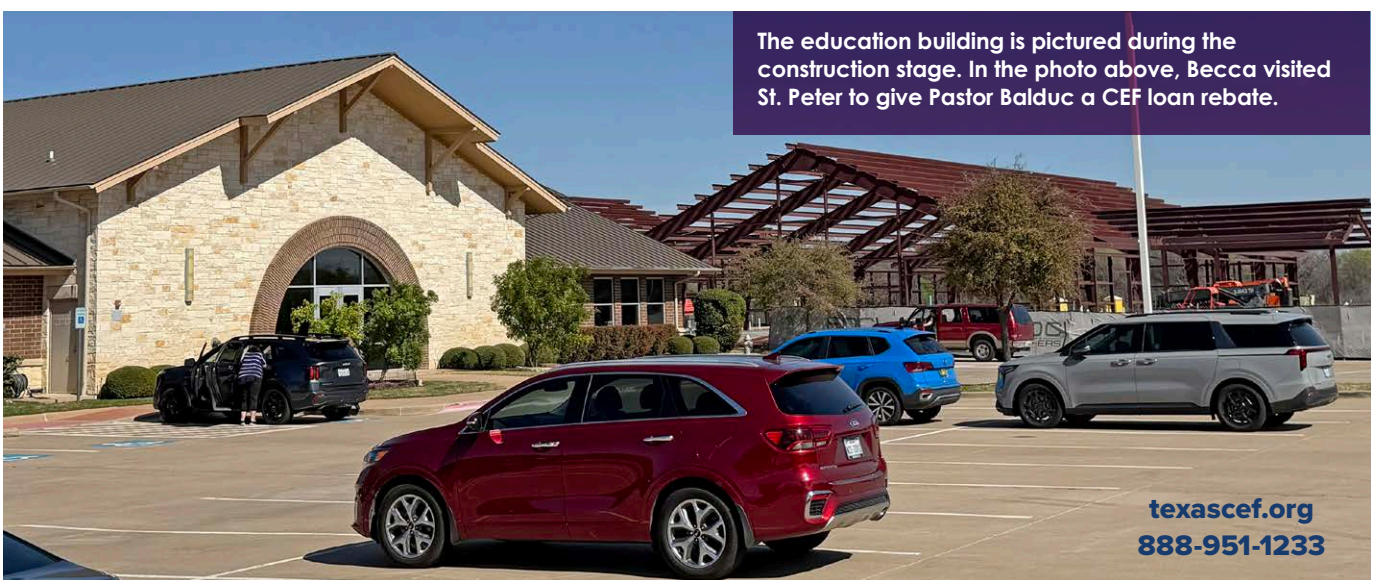
On Aug. 30, I joined Rev. Robert Balduc and the St. Peter Lutheran Church and School community in Northlake for a special celebration — the ribbon cutting of their new education building!

Just one year ago, Texas CEF joined St. Peter for the groundbreaking of this new building. What a blessing it was to return to celebrate as the congregation officially cut the ribbon and opened this exciting new space for ministry! We give thanks for St. Peter as a valued partner in ministry and celebrate the way God is growing His work through this congregation. We are grateful to be part of their journey and look forward to seeing the ways God will use this new school to reach children, families and future generations with the love of Christ.

"Our vision to establish an elementary school to shape young hearts and minds in Christ is now a reality with the strong ministry partnership CEF provided to advance God's Kingdom for His glory," Pastor Balduc said.

It is a joy to celebrate this exciting new chapter with St. Peter Lutheran Church and School. Texas District CEF has been blessed to partner with this congregation through many stages of its ministry, and we look forward with anticipation to seeing how God will use this new school to share Christ and impact generations to come.





The education building is pictured during the construction stage. In the photo above, Becca visited St. Peter to give Pastor Balduc a CEF loan rebate.

texascef.org
888-951-1233

Our Scholarship Endowments



We will not hide them from their children but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. **Psalm 78:4**

One of the ways LWML Texas District supports telling the coming generations of the Lord's glorious deeds is through financial support for district young women attending an LCMS university studying to become full-time church workers. The Scholarship Endowment Fund is our only source of funding for this endeavor. This June, we welcomed four recent scholarship recipients at our convention. It was wonderful to celebrate them and their commitment to the Lord!

Our Scholarship Endowment is not the only way we provide additional funding for our district's mission. Our Mission Inreach Endowment provides additional funding for leadership training, spiritual enrichment and member development, equipping our members and leaders to Serve the LORD with Gladness! (Psalm 100:2). Our Mission Goal Endowment enables us to support even more Mission Grants.

The work of our district and the support of missions stand on the legacy of generations of Lutheran women who have recognized needs in their churches and communities and worked together to meet them. More importantly, God has used our offerings of mites and willing hands and feet to do what only He can do: draw the lost to Himself.

Our endowments stand as a testimony to our resolve to continue this work until Jesus comes again. Many of our members have chosen to create a lasting legacy by including LWML Texas District endowments in their estate plans. When gifts are given as mites, they are used right away; however, when they are designated for an endowment, they are never spent — they become forever gifts! Each gift given to an endowment increases the principal, resulting in larger annual investment distributions that provide greater funding for scholarships, Mission Grants and our mission work together — for generations to come.

For more information on Gifting Today to Bless Tomorrow!, visit *lwmltxdist.org/endowments*.

It's scholarship time! Time to apply!
Do you know of a female member of your Texas District congregation who attends an LCMS university and is preparing to become an LCMS full-time church worker? Encourage her to apply for an LWML scholarship! Applications are available at *lwmltxdist.org/about-us*. Click "Scholarships" and download the 2027 application. Completed applications must be received by March 31, 2027.

Questions? Contact Judy Kunkel at *scholarships@lwmltxdist.org*.

Take a minute and pray for the 2026 scholarship recipients — Caroline, Elizabeth, Lottie, Faith and Teadora (pictured above) — as they study to become Lutheran teachers and musicians.

Send your mite offerings along with a remittance form to:

LWML Texas District
Attn: Alissa Elley, Financial Secretary
P.O. Box 183; Seguin, TX 78156